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A CRITIQUE OF STATE-BUILDING
STRATEGIES IN AFGHANISTAN**

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‘Good’ State vs. ‘Bad’ Warlords? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan¹

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Abstract

The current Afghan government, having weak social roots has been forced to rely on the support of ‘warlords’ to stay in power. But a high price had to be paid. Despite the predominant stress in much current analysis on the issue of regional warlordism, the limited reform achievements in the Kabul ministries and the enduring domination by the militias of some key ministries are potentially much more threatening to the reform and re-establishment of the Afghan state. Widespread corruption is preventing some key ministries from achieving the minimal effectiveness required. Even within Kabul, the focus of the international community has been misplaced. In particular, the pressure of donors on the Ministry of the Interior has been nowhere near as strong as that exerted over the Ministry of Finance. The international community also failed to support adequately the attempts by ‘civil society’ to change the corrupt practices of the state administration.

Introduction

Most of the current analysis produced on Afghanistan views the Afghan predicament as an issue of an ‘enlightened’ elite attempting to rebuild a centralized Afghan state, with the support of the population while facing the opposition of ‘bad’ warlords, who control the provinces and try to maintain their control over their fiefdoms, be they a district, a province or a whole region. Although the picture is presented in such stark terms only in the press, a similar view can also be found, at least implicitly, in the scholarly literature.² This paper examines the capabilities of the centre at implementing existing and forthcoming reform plans, tackling in particular the issue of corruption. The not always clear relationship between the centre and the warlords is another key aspect which this paper addresses, looking not only at the infiltration of the central government by ‘warlords’ and their acolytes, but also at the often ambiguous relationship of some ministers with local warlords and militia leaders. Finally, the paper asks whether relying exclusively or predominantly on external pressure is the best way to push the government towards greater accountability, or whether a higher degree of participation from the population might prove to be a more efficient way of achieving the same goal.

¹ This paper is based mainly on the author’s own experience working and researching in Afghanistan, 2003-2004. For reasons of security, I have not revealed the names of most of those interviewed.

² See for example A. Manuel & P.W. Singer, ‘A New Model Afghan Army’, *Foreign Affairs* (December 2002). A critique of the centralization policy is contained in C. Santos, E. Cabot & P. Behrends, ‘The Unfinished War in Afghanistan: National Governance Dilemma and Geopolitical Imperatives’, New York: Foundation for Central Asian Development, April 2003.

An enlightened government without strong roots

The reformist reputation of the Afghan transitional administration is not wholly undeserved. Moreover, these ministers and their closest collaborators are often remarkable for their management skills and competence. However, their effective political role is limited by the fact that they lack deep roots within the country. Without direct support from the Coalition, which it is often not willing to give and that in any case could easily be counter-productive, the 'enlightened' elite is unable to take any major step, especially in terms of confronting the power of the 'warlords'. In fact, without such support, the 'enlightened' elite would never have reached power in the first place.

If the room for manoeuvre of the modernizing elite is indeed limited, it is also true that it did not use very skilfully even what was available. While it is useful to describe the Afghan political scene in sociological terms, it should not be forgotten that political leadership skills will remain key to taking Afghanistan firmly back in the international community. Although President Karzai generally enjoys a good press, at least in the Western hemisphere, diplomatic and UN sources in Kabul are ready to acknowledge that his political leadership skills are limited.³ His choice as the President of Afghanistan appears to have been determined in part by haste, but also by the desire to privilege the public relations aspect at the expense of more substantial political issues. It is also likely that the Bush Administration might have wanted a weak leader in charge in Kabul, in order to be able to push him in whichever direction might have been needed. If Karzai had been bolder when confronted with the problem of how to distribute and balance power among the different factions, he could have played up the threat of US enmity in order to force warlords and militia leaders to content themselves with a more modest share of power. It would have been a gamble, since the reaction of the military commanders of the United Front, in which most of the opposition to the Taleban was grouped, would have been difficult to predict exactly. However, in politics it is sometimes necessary to take risks. Given the fear of American air power among the militia leaders, there were good chances that such a gamble would succeed. That would have created more favourable conditions for the building of a stronger central state in Afghanistan. Even the celebrated dropping of Marshal Fahim as vice-presidential candidate at the end of July 2004, which was read by many in the press and in the diplomatic community as a sudden display of bravery on Karzai's side, was due to Fahim's refusal to resign from his post of Minister of Defence, as required by the electoral law.⁴ It is likely that Fahim's candidacy as vice-president had, from the beginning, been conceived as a way to remove him from the Ministry, in compliance with US demands.

When the Coalition started looking for suitable members of the new post-Taleban government, the most obvious candidates were the members of the tribal aristocracy, who had managed to survive and maintain some political influence within the country. This group of aristocrats, led by Hamid Karzai, had limited pockets of support in the country, especially in the region surrounding Kandahar, and could bank on the popularity of the former king, Zahir Shah. However, they lacked the skills to rebuild the country and to earn the trust of international donors. It was therefore necessary to recruit professional Afghans from abroad, mainly from the US. These were especially needed for the more technical positions within the cabinet, as in the case of Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani, but also for some politically

³ See also K. Gannon, 'Afghans See U.S.-Backed Warlords As Enemy', AP 7 September 2003; S. Robinson, 'Karzai's Kabul: Fit for a King?', *Time*, 18 April 2002.

⁴ UPI, 27 July 2004.

sensitive ones, like Interior Minister Jalali. Mostly with an Afghan-American background, or at least educated in the West, this small group of modernizers had difficulties in finding supporters among the Afghan population, when returning after many years spent abroad. There might also be some hostility felt towards diaspora Afghans who had not shared the difficulties and horrors of the long years of war. Whole generations missed the opportunity to experience anything approaching modern education, and the local intelligentsia has often been cut off from large sectors of the population. Although the popularity of the clergy is in decline, it is still more influential than it was in the 1970s, before the war, and represents a barrier to the influence of the educated elite. Most of the militia leaders themselves, despite often appreciating the services of members of the intelligentsia, are deeply hostile to the idea of the educated elite playing a leadership role. This is in part because, being themselves mostly uneducated, they fear the competition of a social group which claims to be the obvious candidate for running the new Afghan state. Their worries are reflected in the claim that former *jihadi* fighters should be guaranteed a role in the running of the Afghan state, a claim that is the rallying point of the Islamic parties and became part of the programme of presidential candidate Yunis Qanuni in the 2004 elections. However, the fact that the Afghan intelligentsia is largely secular in outlook is also a source of hostility among the ranks of the militia commanders, who come, with very few exceptions, from an Islamist or fundamentalist background. The Afghan intelligentsia represented a core group of support for the communist regime in 1980-1992, and is often seen by the commanders as a key enemy. At that time, most of the positions in the central and local administration were held by educated people, a fact that favoured identifying them with the regime.⁵ While in Kabul and some other large cities the liberal and monarchist sections of the intelligentsia have a real influence, outside the cities most of what is left of the intelligentsia has a background in the communist parties.⁶ It is therefore seen as a particular target by the militia leaders, and still struggles to re-emerge from its hideouts. In any case, because of its leftist background, this intelligentsia is often suspicious of the technocrats who came from the West, and even if it were eventually to reassert some of its influence, it cannot be taken for granted that it would support the modernizers in Kabul in the medium and long term.

These two groups, aristocracy and educated elite, became the staunchest supporters of the plan sponsored by the international community to rebuild and modernize the Afghan state (the Bonn Agreement), although their agendas did not entirely coincide. They could not, however, run the country on their own and, in order to be able to operate at all, had to strike alliances with other, far less 'enlightened' forces: the so-called 'warlords' or militia leaders. Short of a major intervention by the Coalition, this was the only choice available in early 2002, when all of Afghanistan was under the control of these forces. These alliances coincided to a large extent (and not by chance) with those that the Coalition forces formed with a number of warlords and factional military leaders. As a result, the rule of warlords and factional leaders over the regions was legitimised and they were brought into the state structure. The assumption appears to have been that the first stage of state re-building in Afghanistan could only be based on the cooptation of the warlords into the state administration and security forces, because of the limited resources available and the unwillingness of the Coalition to commit its troops to exercise pressure on the warlords. This 'feudal stage' should have allowed the enlightened elite to consolidate the centre, by building capacity in the ministries and creating new and loyal security services. Once this consolidation had been achieved, the

⁵ For more information on this topic, see A. Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2000.

⁶ Assessment carried out during fieldwork in northern and northeastern Afghanistan; and interviews with UN officials in Kabul.

modernized core of the state could have started expanding towards the periphery, either by reining in and reforming the warlords, or by replacing them and their acolytes.

If this was indeed the plan, it was neither foolish nor irrational, but it had to be implemented under a number of constraints. First of all, the development of loyal security services proceeded much slower than planned, a fact that prevented the central state from sufficiently increasing its leverage on the warlords.⁷ Also, the warlords and other local power holders turned out to be much more resilient than Karzai and his circle (or, for that matter, the international community) had expected. In May 2003, for example, he tried to push a group of them, which he had gathered in Kabul, to accept a set of policy guidelines. Although they formally agreed to do so, once they returned to their provinces they mostly failed to comply. Moreover, despite a façade of satisfaction with the accomplishments of the Kabul government, according to diplomatic and UN sources in Kabul, the international donors who were financing the rebuilding of the Afghan state soon started to put the Afghan government under pressure to start delivering, which in some cases might have forced the government to take premature steps or not to use the resources available in the most rational way. Cosmetic measures took precedence over more long-term reforms, and in most cases ended up leaving everything as it was. Finally, not only do the technocrats and aristocracy not necessarily share the same agenda, but they are not united internally either. The aristocracy soon split between supporters of Karzai, who were ready to dump the idea of a restoration of the monarchy for the sake of an alliance with some of the militias; and the loyalists of the former king, Zahir Shah, who maintained the need to re-establish the kingdom of Afghanistan. The technocrats, on the other hand, are not split on political or ideological issues, but suffered from bitter personal rivalries. These divisions could only hamper the work of rebuilding and modernizing the Afghan state, but most importantly they weakened the two groups *vis-à-vis* the militias. The aristocrats definitely showed a much greater inclination than the technocrats to deal with the warlords and militia leaders, especially when these were Pashtuns and even if some technocratic ministers were hostile to such individuals. Karzai himself, after all, has militias who respond directly to him and his family in the areas of Kandahar and Uruzgan, where his tribe lives.⁸ The most obvious example of a strong relationship between the aristocratic faction within the cabinet and a militia leader is that of Gul Agha Shirzai, who, thanks to American largesse, emerged in 2002 as the most powerful militia leader in the area of Kandahar. He maintained close links with Karzai throughout the 2002-2004 period. Eventually, following multiple complaints about Shirzai's inability to administer the province, reluctance to transfer custom duties to Kabul, and repeated allegations of abuses and corruption, Karzai had to remove him from his position as Governor of Kandahar and replace him with Yussef Pashtun, personally close to Gul Agha, but more skilled as an administrator.⁹ Gul Agha, in any case, was not altogether shunned by Karzai, and was promoted to Minister of Urban Development.

On the whole, the aristocrats did not prove very effective in establishing a strong power structure through their tribal allies, for a number of reasons. With the exception of Kandahar, due to the control of key ministries by the Islamic parties, much of the administration of the Pashtun belt fell into the hands of the Islamist commanders, despite their lack of popular

⁷ See A. Giustozzi, 'The politics of military reform', forthcoming; and M. Sedra (ed.), *Confronting Afghanistan's Security Dilemma*, Bonn, BICC, 2003, at <http://www.bicc.de/publications/briefs/brief28/content.html>.

⁸ The commando brigade of Kandahar was until 2003 under the command of Ahmad Wali Karzai, one of the President's brothers, and is composed of Karzai's fellow tribesmen. 15th Militia Div. of Kandahar is also made up of Popolzai tribesmen (Karzai's tribe) and is widely reckoned to be loyal to the president.

⁹ *Dawn*, 18 August 2003; *Newsweek*, 9 June 2003; *New York Times*, 16 November 2003.

support and only relative military strength. On the other hand, true warlordism never really existed in Afghanistan's Pashtun belt, where the balance of power remained much more fluid and tribal leaders maintained a strong influence. No individual, therefore, managed to gather in his hands an amount of power and control over the territory even remotely comparable to that of the big warlords of northeastern, northern and western Afghanistan.

Bringing the warlords in

The term 'warlords' is often abused, but here it is meant to indicate something rather precise: military leaders who emerge to play a *de facto* political role, despite their lack of full legitimacy.¹⁰ A distinction is made between warlords, who exercise complete control over their armies, and militia leaders, a more general term that also includes commanders who do not completely own their armies, but are constrained by some degree of political or tribal control. 'Warlord' is not meant here as a pejorative synonym for 'regional leader'. Assuming that the only warlords or militia leaders who matter are those in the provinces prevents an understanding of the Afghan predicament. The most obvious example of this is the presence of several warlords, or their associates, within the central government itself. Out of 27 ministers in early 2004, four were warlords or militia leaders (Mohammad Fahim, Mohammad Mohaqeq, Sayyed Hussain Anwari, Gul Agha Shirzai); and at least three more (by a very conservative estimate) could be considered as deeply involved in the warlords system, one being the son of Ismail Khan, warlord of Herat (Mirwais Saddiq), and two close associates of Fahim (Yunus Qanoni and Abdullah Abdullah).¹¹

What is true of the central government, applies even more to the local administration. Of the first group of 32 governors appointed in 2002, at least 20 were former commanders of the civil war period. Later the situation changed slightly, with some governors with a different background being appointed in a few provinces between the latter part of 2003 and the early months of 2004. However, the presence of militia leaders among the governors remained strong. Small commanders also populated the ranks of the district managers.¹²

The plight of the provincial administrative departments was not very different, with many heads of departments being, if not former commanders, at least their close associates; and the same was true of the Ministries of Defence (MoD) and Interior (MoI).¹³ Many of those employed in the administration during 2002-2004, especially at the higher level, had no previous professional experience and often lacked basic educational skills.¹⁴ It is not uncommon to find semi-illiterate men heading key departments, with just a few years of private (*madrasa*) education and barely able to read and write, if at all. Although they might rely on the experience of their staff to run their departments, it is clear that not much can be expected from an administration whose key managerial staff are selected on the basis of considerations of political patronage and nepotism, often with complete disregard of the skills needed. Plans to improve the training of junior staff were formulated during 2002 and 2003, and some began to be implemented in 2004, but these did not address the problem of how

¹⁰ See A. Giustozzi, 'Respectable Warlords?', *The Politics of State-building in post-Taliban Afghanistan*, *Crisis States Working Paper*, 33, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2003, for a more detailed discussion.

¹¹ Gul Agha Shirzai is one of those militia leaders who is constrained by the tribal nature of his base of support and cannot therefore be considered a true warlord. This type of militia leader is the most common throughout the 'Pashtun belt'.

¹² Assessment carried out during fieldwork in Afghanistan.

¹³ See Giustozzi (2003 & forthcoming), for a description of the same process in the case of the army.

¹⁴ Assessment carried out during fieldwork in Afghanistan.

managers are selected.¹⁵ It is not just a matter of political appointees filling the gaps created in the administration by years of war and destruction. In many cases, experienced staff, who were still occupying their positions at the time the Taleban fell, were sacked to make room for relatives and cronies of *jihadi* commanders. In some cases, these replacements took place despite the disagreement of the provincial authorities, since through threats the commanders were able to force professional staff to stay home and leave the field free for their cronies. More often, however, the appointments sponsored by the militia leaders were accepted by the MoI, regardless of their professional skills.¹⁶

The relationship between the militia leaders incorporated within the cabinet and the modernizers and the aristocrats was far from easy, especially at the outset. At first sight, much of the conflict between the technocrats and the warlords appears to concern symbolic issues, rather than substantial ones. For example, control over the provincial customs revenues was a major bone of contention throughout 2002-2004. In reality, only a single province (Herat) ever enjoyed revenue levels higher than what the central government is supposed to spend locally, and would therefore need to turn part of its revenues over to Kabul.¹⁷ It is, however, a conflict about power and control. The aristocrats fared somewhat better in dealing with the militia leaders, despite some initial wrangling. The case of Defence Minister Fahim can be considered exemplary in this regard. Widely regarded as the patron of most of Afghanistan's warlords, and probably the most powerful militia leader himself, Fahim was also seen during most of 2002 and 2003 as a rival of Karzai, to the extent that he was thought to harbour some presidential ambitions. Despite repeated forecasts of the tension between Fahim and Karzai being about to escalate to open confrontation,¹⁸ the two managed to keep their differences within limits. By the time of the Constitutional *Loya Jirga* (Tribal Council) in December 2003, it appeared obvious that the political standing of Fahim among the population was nearly negligible. Possibly the most unpopular politician of Afghanistan, and widely rumoured to be at the centre of corruption and misconduct scandals, Fahim could no longer plausibly pretend to be a presidential candidate.¹⁹ He still held, however, a huge amount of power through his control of the MoD, and his influence over the National Security Department (NSD) and the police. In other words, he was better placed than anybody else to manipulate and exploit the local militia leaders in the interest of the core groups within the government in Kabul. A weakened, but still powerful, Fahim was exactly what Karzai needed and, indeed, at the *Loya Jirga* Fahim emerged as Karzai's most important ally. His role was not merely shifting the weight of his few direct supporters behind Karzai, but allegedly also,

¹⁵ For the different training programs, see:

http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/afghanistan/weeklyreports/060204_report.pdf (USAID);

<http://www.undp.org.af/gov11.htm> and

http://www.benhammersley.com/reportage/afghanistan_august_2003.html (UNDP);

http://www.adb.org/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_Fact_Sheet_FA_May04.pdf (ADB);

http://www.gopa.de/jobs/offers/Afghanistan_FoodSecSurv_CapacityBldgExpert.html (EU);

<http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANEXTN/0..contentMDK:20143800~menuPK:305992~pagePK:141137~piPK:217854~theSitePK:305985.00.html>

(World Bank).

¹⁶ Interviews with local officials in the provinces, 2003-2004.

¹⁷ For more details see B. Rubin & H. Malikyar, *The politics of center-periphery relations in Afghanistan*, Center for International Cooperation, New York University, March 2003, pp.30-33.

¹⁸ See for example Susan B. Glasser & Pamela Constable, 'Power struggle between Karzai, Fahim flares up', *Dawn*, 6 August 2002; *Washington Post*, 5 August 2002; Carlotta Gall, *New York Times*, 22 July 2002; Robinson (2002); Halima Kazem, 'Brewing power struggle in Kabul', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 October 2003.

¹⁹ Based on interviews carried among Afghan intellectuals in Kabul and in the provinces, 2003-2004. See also A. Rashid, 'Karzai's reshuffle offers chance for Afghanistan to make break with violent past', *Eurasia Insight*, 28 July 2004.

and more importantly, offering the services of his cronies and allies to intimidate Karzai's opponents.²⁰ Fahim's importance to Karzai of course extended well beyond the *Loya Jirga*, which in any case was an important success for the embattled President. His alliance with the President prevented the possibility of the creation of a common front of the majority of the warlords against Karzai. It would have greatly enhanced Karzai's chances of obtaining a pro-presidential majority in the parliamentary elections of 2004, if these had been held, given the ability of the warlords to determine most electoral races. Contrary to other members of the original anti-Taliban alliance, Fahim was not a strong opponent of centralization, as long as it he could benefit from the process.²¹ On these grounds, an alliance with Karzai and the aristocrats was comparatively easy.

Significantly, while Karzai was reviving and strengthening his alliance with Fahim, he moved to weaken the presence of the warlords opposed to centralization within the government. Mohaqeq, the Minister of Planning and a key opponent of centralisation, was dismissed by Karzai in March 2004, replaced by Ramazan Bashardost, a western-educated technocrat. At the same time, on several occasions Karzai clearly showed his dislike for another key opponent of centralization, Rashid Dostum, and repeatedly during 2002-2004 opposed his incorporation in the government in "the key position that he deserves".²² Although Dostum was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence in 2002, he never really exercised any real role, nor held any power. Later, as a special presidential advisor on security, he was never summoned by Karzai for consultations and the role remained largely ceremonial. Finally, during 2004, Karzai failed to appoint Dostum to any significant role within the government, despite the agreement of the Americans and Dostum's offer of support in the presidential elections.²³

On the other hand, Fahim never managed to establish good relations with the group of professionals centred around Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani, because the latter's support for technocratic elements undermined the legitimacy of the *ihadis*' control over most positions of power. Ghani's demand to increase the influence of technocrats was seen in practice as being aimed at a 'Pashtun' restoration in Afghanistan, given the belief that Pashtuns represent a disproportionate share of Afghans educated in the West. While Karzai was also often suspected of trying to re-establish Pashtun supremacy, Fahim and his circle needed him as the only moderate Pashtun leader of some credibility who is ready to work with them. Whether Fahim felt strongly about this or exploited this issue to build up support among his northern constituencies, the 're-Pashtunisation' rallying cry did have a genuine appeal among the minorities. An example of the sensitivities that the re-Pashtunisation issue can rouse is provided by the case of Balkh province, where the justifiable decision to replace the local chief of police in October 2003 was transformed into a political issue by the choice of a Pashtun from Kandahar, Mohammed Akram Khakraiswal, as the new appointment. The Minister of the Interior meant to install a central government loyalist, but could not find anyone better than a Pashtun, and risked alienating even the support of some of those among

²⁰ Lailuma Sadid, 'Delegates, Journalists Report Threats, Intimidation', *Afghan Recovery Report*, 99 (4 January 2004), Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Human Rights Watch, 'Afghanistan: Constitutional Process Marred by Abuses', 8 January 2004. At least one high ranking member of the MoD, General Daoud, attended the *Loya Jirga* proceedings, contrary to the regulations, in the opinion of many with the purpose of intimidating the delegates through his presence.

²¹ For some of Fahim's pro-centralisation statements, see Rubin & Malikiyar (2003), p.40.

²² In the words of Dostum's spokesman, Majid Rowzi (AFP, 28 October 2004). Dostum himself declared that "I will ask Karzai to appoint me as defence minister, army chief-of-staff or give me a military position with 20,000 soldiers" (*Al Jazeera*, 19 January 2004).

²³ Reuters, 8 April 2004; *Washington Times*, 11 December 2003.

the local Uzbeks and Tajiks who were in favour, in principle, of a stronger presence of the central government.²⁴ The fact that most modernizers within the government tend to identify loyalty to the state with personal loyalty to the President, to key reformist ministers, or even with the appurtenance to a specific ethnic group, is certainly going to be a potential source of trouble in the future. This can only partly be excused by the small number of Afghans who can unreservedly and unanimously be identified as committed to the cause of an impartial central state. Although such a policy has never been formally announced, the lobbying of the *jihadi* groups has obviously been successful in preventing the appointment of most of the former leftists in positions of responsibility, especially of those who did not transfer their allegiance to one of the *jihadi* factions.²⁵ During the heydays of the pro-Soviet regime, about half of the intelligentsia was directly involved with it. Although tens of thousands have since left the country and a significant number has been killed, an estimated 100,000 former members of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party still live in Afghanistan, not to count the members of related organizations, such the Democratic Youth Organisation of Afghanistan.²⁶ These are mostly educated people, often to degree level, and represent a key reservoir of skills and know-how that the country can hardly afford to marginalize. Although a small number did make their way to relatively important positions, including a few ministers, the large majority is still denied access to qualified jobs, which have instead been granted to often uneducated clients of *jihadi* commanders.

Ghani and his supporters fully reciprocated Fahim's antagonism, for a number of reasons. They probably saw his role in government as harmful to the pace of modernisation, and even after the *Loya Jirga* probably still considered him as too dangerous to work with unless his power was further eroded. During 2004, the Ministry of Finance became one of the driving forces behind the Disarmament, Demilitarization and Rehabilitation Programme (DDR), with its policy of threatening to stop transferring funds to the MoD by the deadlines set for the disarmament of the different units. Even more importantly, Ghani's threat to abandon the cabinet in the summer of 2004 was instrumental in forcing Karzai to end his alliance with Fahim and drop him from of the presidential ticket. Shortly after, Karzai even hinted that Fahim was not to be expected to be a member of the post-electoral cabinet.²⁷

This does not mean, however, that the technocrats altogether refused to establish some relationship with other, lesser militia leaders, especially when a chance was seen to weaken some of the bigger regional power holders. The technocrats relied on their control over international funding to weaken the regional power holders and subjugate them, by attracting some of their subordinate commanders. They rarely linked up with the warlords directly or openly, but neither do they appear to have complained much about the dealings of the aristocratic allies. A clear example of the manipulation to which ministers of the Karzai administration sometimes resorted is given by Western Afghanistan, which in early 2002 was the fief of Afghanistan's foremost warlord, Ismail Khan. Due to his steadfast refusal to cooperate with the central government, he earned the enmity of pro-centralization ministers, who during 2002 began to recruit small warlords opposed to Ismail to the cause of the central government, including some of his former allies. Shindand district of Herat province was one of the earliest examples of this policy, already during 2002. Despite his past support for the

²⁴ Associated Press, 27 October 2003.

²⁵ UN sources, Kabul.

²⁶ Interviews with Afghan intellectuals in Kabul and the provinces.

²⁷ Pamela Constable, 'Karzai's talks raise fears about elections', *Washington Post*, 29 May 2004; Reuters, 29 May 2004; Carlotta Gall, 'Afghan Leader, in a Surprise, Picks a New Running Mate', *New York Times*, 27 July 2004.

Taleban commander, Amanullah Khan, who controlled part of the district and opposed Ismail Khan both on political and ethnic grounds, enjoyed the support of Gul Agha Shirzai, militia commander of Kandahar; and, which allowed him to hold out against the much more powerful Ismail Khan²⁸. Through Gul Agha's alliance with the president, it could be argued that Amanullah enjoyed Karzai's indirect support. In Amanullah's case, however, there was never a direct statement of support from the central government and he was never appointed to any official position.

By contrast, in the case of Ghor province, the MoI effectively appointed as governor a former ally of Ismail Khan, Dr. Ibrahim, who has since broken with him. In response, Ismail Khan continued to support the deputy, Mullah Din Mohammed, who after the summer of 2003 chased Dr. Ibrahim from the provincial capital Chaghcharan and prevented him from coming back for several months. This was one of the earliest cases in which a deliberate Kabul policy to support some warlords against others led to armed clashes.²⁹ In Baghdis province, the government first tried to lure governor Gul Mohammad Arifi away from Ismail Khan, again leading to armed clashes, and then, once Ismail managed to 'buy back' Arifi, in March 2004 the government appointed a new governor, Azizullah Afzali, known to be more resolutely opposed to Ismail Khan.³⁰

Having succeeded in weakening him in the outlying areas, the modernizers moved their focus closer to Ismail Khan's real centre of power, Herat province. Like other 'warlords', in mid-2003, Ismail Khan was forced to choose between the position of governor and that of military commander, and opted for the former. The command of the 4th Army Corps was given to Baz Muhammad Ahmadi, who was from Badakhshan and not a loyalist of Ismail. During late 2003 the commander of the 17th Div., Zahir Nayebzada, once an ally of Ismail, started shifting his allegiance to the central government, initially due to personal grievances against his former patron, but later also due to the encouragement of Ismail's enemies in Kabul. Ismail Khan took these as clear signs that the central government was aiming to get rid of him, an interpretation of the events that was probably correct. The progressively intensifying efforts of some ministers to lure away commanders loyal to Ismail led to growing tension and the situation rapidly escalated in the armed clashes of March 2004, which led to the defeat of Nayebzada, but also to the deployment of the national army in Herat.³¹ In August 2004, a new and more successful attempt to decisively weaken Ismail Khan took place, centred this time on the alliance between Amanullah Khan, Zahir Nayebzada and Dr. Ibrahim. The alleged involvement of a number of ministers in sponsoring the concerted attack against Ismail Khan's domains is difficult to prove, but despite the denial of the central government, the behaviour of the national army troops dispatched by the central government highlighted the fact that many within the government were not at all displeased with the assault on Ismail Khan, which cost at least fifty lives. The national army intervened to freeze the situation, preserving some of the gains made by Amanullah Khan, including the occupation of Shindand district.³² What is especially interesting in this case is that Karzai and the reformist ministers in Kabul resorted to manipulative tricks typical of the warlords in order to weaken Ismail Khan. Unable to push the development of the National Army and other central state agencies fast enough, they opted for buying off middle level warlords and turning them against their old patron. Inevitably this led to armed clashes and loss of life. It is important to point out that

²⁸ Interviews with UN officials, Herat, May 2004.

²⁹ On the case of Ghor see Rubin & Malikiyar (2003), p.14; and *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 2003.

³⁰ Interviews with UN officials, Herat, May 2004.

³¹ Reuters, 23 March 2004.

³² *Arman-e Milli*, 16 August 2004; Reuters 17 August 2004.

the warlords siding with the central government were not necessarily the best of the lot. Nayebzada, for example, was involved in the smuggling of narcotics and his human rights record was no better than that of Ismail Khan himself.³³ Should he be incorporated in the state, the implications would be obvious.

The dangers of spurious alliances

The case of Herat, and many other places in Afghanistan, highlights how the alliance with the warlords brings into question a number of issues, even leaving aside the moral one. On the one hand, through the particular make-up of the alliance, conflict has been 'embedded' in the process of rebuilding, due to the lasting rivalry among the different warlords and between the warlords and other components of Afghan society.³⁴ At least as important is the issue of the implications of this alliance for the legitimacy of the 'modernizing' government. Like President Najibullah before him, Karzai could be tied down by his spurious alliances with the warlords and lose in legitimacy what he gains in political power. Najibullah recruited many former opposition commanders to his side during 1987-1991, but in so doing he weakened his legitimacy within the ranks of his own party (the communist *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq*) and strengthened the opposition to his rule within his own camp. Eventually the internal opposition played a key role in his overthrow.³⁵

Another danger is that the incorporation of 'rotten apples' into the alliance led by Karzai could lead to the same fate met by the *jihadi* movement. Today it is difficult to distinguish between *madrassa*-educated boys who became commanders, and bandits who became warlords; but in the *jihad* movement of 1978-1992 these two components were originally separate. The story of the process of their merger has yet to be written,³⁶ but it would certainly contribute to explaining how the *jihad* movement could degenerate so quickly after taking power in 1992. Based on field work in Afghanistan and on interviews with local actors and observers, a preliminary picture can be drawn. In 1978, before the conflict started, the Islamist movement was even weaker than the communists and its rapid expansion during the 1980s came at a price. Not only was the quality of the newly recruited cadres markedly inferior to the older members, but also the military ranks of the *mujahidin* were filled without much care or pre-selection. The rise to the role of commander, and the subsequent career up to the role of warlord, were determined by a number of factors, among which political skills were far from being predominant. The successful commander needed some battlefield skills, but most importantly for the type of war waged in Afghanistan he needed to be able to maintain his authority among the combatants and the civilian population, and to be able to gather the resources required for maintaining his armed force operational. In other words, in many cases ruthlessness in extracting resources from the population might have been a more important skill than mobilizing political support. The 'bandits', who initially played a marginal role, became more and more important for the expansion and consolidation of the *jihadi* movement, and soon the Islamist militants and the bandits were living in a state of symbiosis with each other.

A good illustration of the risks associated with the policy of allying with warlords, even when they declare their allegiance to the central government, is provided by the developments in

³³ Interviews with UN source, Herat, May 2004.

³⁴ A. Surkhe, K. B. Harpviken, & A. Strand, *Conflictual Peacebuilding: Afghanistan Two Years after Bonn*, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2004, p.vi.

³⁵ See Giustozzi (2000), pp.198ff.

³⁶ B. Rubin., 'The political economy of war and peace in Afghanistan', paper presented at the meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group, Stockholm, Sweden, 21 June 1999.

Faryab province during the early months of 2004. Enyatollah Enoyat was appointed governor of this province in 2003, as a loyal supporter of the central government and because of his independence or even hostility to Rashid Dostum and his party, Junbesh, which are the dominant force in the area and aim to maintain their autonomy from the central government. He soon found out that he was powerless to enforce government authority without the cooperation of Junbesh and initially accepted to work out a compromise with Dostum. Neither Enoyat nor the central government were particularly happy with this compromise and the emergence of the new alliance between Karzai and Fahim in Kabul offered an opportunity to try and weaken the hold of Junbesh in Faryab. Hashim Habibi had emerged during 2003 as one of the most ambitious commanders within Junbesh, if anything else because his control of most of Faryab granted him a power base relatively autonomous from Dostum. He rapidly became the big commander of Junbesh most notorious for heavily taxing the population and soon embarked on a purge of the smaller commanders whose loyalty he was not sure of, forcing them to flee Faryab. His desire of autonomy and disregard for Dostum's political directives inevitably set him on a collision course with his former patron. Soon Habibi began to show interest in the offers of cooperation coming from the MoD, even if as late as October 2003 he had clashed with the 23rd Div. in Faryab and forced the commander, loyal to the MoD, to flee. Enoyat on the other hand was a popular governor initially, but being frustrated by his lack of effective power and apparently encouraged by the central government, he edged increasingly closer to Habibi. The new partnership with Habibi allowed the governor to consolidate his power, but at the price of a loss of popularity. Habibi was, in fact, the most unpopular of the warlords of Faryab, especially due to his levying of high taxes. As a result, when in April 2004 the other local commanders, with the support of Dostum and of Habibi's own militiamen and the cheers of most of the inhabitants, organized a mutiny and chased Habibi out of Faryab, Enoyat became a target himself and was forced to follow suit and leave the province.³⁷

Although the communist governments of 1980-1992 also often dealt with warlords, they were always keen to keep them away from the central state administration. No warlord was ever appointed to the cabinet during the communist years, nor as provincial governor, although some of them succeeded in becoming district managers. As a rule, they were appointed military commanders or received honorific and ceremonial positions, such as senator or *loya jirga* (tribal council) delegate, but no direct contamination of the state administration was allowed. Even if, as military commanders, they were often in a position to influence the administration of the districts, they were kept separate from it.³⁸ With the collapse of the state administration in 1992, it ceased to be of much importance who occupied the key posts in the state bureaucracy, so that the massive promotion of *jihadi* commanders to the top posts had little impact. It was under Karzai, therefore, that a major new step towards allowing the warlords to occupy the Afghan state was taken, both because the interim and transitional administration legitimised the occupation of large portions of the state by the warlords and their associates, and because, with the beginning of the rehabilitation of the Afghan state, this 'occupation' began to have an impact on the running of the state. Removing this negative influence is not going to be easy, even if it proves possible to get rid of those ministers who have a militia background. A good example is provided by the MoI, where after the removal of Minister Qanuni in 2003 and the appointment of two ministers close to the monarchists, Taj Mohammed Wardak and Ahmed Jalali, little change has taken place in the staffing of key posts. It would have made better sense to ally with the regional warlords, at least as long as

³⁷ Interviews with UN officials, August 2003 and April 2004; interviews with Homayun Sorkhabi, London, 29 August 2003.

³⁸ For details see Giustozzi (2000); and A. Giustozzi, 'Military Reform in Afghanistan', in Sedra (2003).

the central state had not been modernized and consolidated, in order to keep at bay the militias which were interested in establishing themselves at the heart of the government. Karzai could have exploited the fear of international intervention, which was then very strong among the militia commanders and the warlords, to contain them. An appeasement policy might still have been necessary, but it would not have been impossible to select individuals close to the militias because of their ideological or social background, but with a higher professional profile and a greater independence than the militia leaders themselves.

The failure to reform the ministries

Another important issue raised by the incorporation of the warlords into the state bureaucracy is the impact on its efficiency and capabilities. At the root of the idea of handing over key parts of the central state to the militia leaders must have been the assumption that it does not really matter who holds the power, as long as he subscribes to some key principles, such as a strong central state and certain alignments of power within and outside Afghanistan. However, this begs the question of whether staffing the ministries with illiterate, incompetent, unreliable and/or corrupt people really has no relevance for state building, reconstruction and development. Once the centre had been consolidated and capacity built in the ministries, through the recruitment of professional staff, the training of existing staff, the hiring of advisors from abroad and the restructuring of the way the ministries work (introducing, for example, the principles of accountability and transparency), it would then be possible to expand towards the periphery, reining in the warlords who were in control of the different regions, or replacing them. During 2003 different measures were enforced to this end, such as shifting administrators around, selecting deputies and other professional people to sometimes replace their chiefs, or occasionally recruiting entirely new staff. Unfortunately, by the end of 2003 most ministries were still in a depressing condition and were far from being able to successfully expand towards the provinces. Some of them might have become more efficient, like the Ministry of Finance, but some key ministries, like the MoI, had by then reached new peaks of corruption and were unable or unwilling to account for the use of budgeted funds. Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani estimated in 2003 that 10-30% of salaries were being stolen before reaching the intended beneficiaries.³⁹

The case of the MoI shows well the implications of handing over portions of the state to the warlords, even if those warlords might have been in favour of a centralized state. The need to reform the MoI was recognized at an early stage, if anything else because the aristocrats and the technocrats thought it unacceptable to leave both security ministries (MoI and MoD) in the hands of *Shura-i Nezar*, the faction of Marshal Fahim. A new minister, Taj Mohammed, an Afghan-American and former governor of the time of the king, was appointed as early as June 2002, to replace Yunus Qanuni with a mandate to undertake sweeping reforms. He failed to change anything at the MoI, and in January 2003 a new minister, Ahmad Jalali, aligned with the technocrats, in turn replaced him. He also promised to implement deep reforms, but his achievements during his first year in office were modest. He immediately established human rights offices in each provincial and district police department, and made some efforts to appoint more professionally prepared officers to positions of responsibility, but he never managed to bring the ministry effectively under his control. On paper, he sacked 22 out of 32 provincial governors and a much larger number of district managers and other officials, but in most cases it was just a matter of shifting them to another province, rather than getting rid of them altogether. Often, when trying to appoint new officials, he faced resistance from the

³⁹ *The Economic Times*, 28 May 2003; Hafizullah Gardish, 'Corruption rampant at every level', *Afghan Recovery Report*, 120, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 27 May 2004.

local commanders, from within his own ministry and from other members of the government, chiefly the Minister of Defence. In the early months of his stay in office, he sometimes showed a willingness to confront officials reluctant to behave in a disciplined way. For example, in early 2003 he sacked the Gardez chief of police, who was heavily involved in criminal activities. When the latter refused to stand down, Jalali dispatched an armed contingent to accompany the new appointee and even sacked the provincial governor, who had tried to mediate.⁴⁰

An important reform, from the point of view of increased centralization, was the abolition in 2002 of the zonal system, which allowed some key governors to legitimise their control over several provinces. Another potentially key move to curtail the power of the governors took place in mid-2003, when they were forced to relinquish any role as military commanders, or else quit as governors. The MoI was also busy during most of 2003, reclaiming the direct control of the ministries over the provincial administrations. The role of the governors in 2002-2003 had grown much beyond what it used to be before 1978, especially in terms of influence over the administrative departments, which were once controlled directly by the ministries in Kabul.⁴¹ Although the practice of governors appointing district managers, rather than the MoI, was curtailed during 2003, some of them, most notably Ismail Khan of Herat, were still indulging in it by spring 2004. Judging from the appointments made, during the latter part of 2003 and 2004, the government also started to select governors and district managers who were not originally from the area, a practice of the Afghan government until 1992.

Despite these undeniable efforts to reassert the central state, towards the end of 2003 and during the first few months of 2004, the incisiveness of Jalali's action appeared to wear off, possibly because he was unable to confront pressures coming from so many sides and to count on the cooperation of the officials of his own ministry. Reclaiming power for the centre was of little use if the ministries were unable to use it effectively. His main political failure was, however, the inability to replace individuals within the ministry itself, which made it difficult to implement any serious policy of new appointments in the provinces. He defended himself by claiming that his ministry was often unable to replace incompetent or corrupt officials due to the lack of suitable candidates, although given the very low quality of many such appointments it is more likely that, due to inefficiency, the ministry was unable to identify better-qualified potential appointees. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that in many cases professionally prepared officials were replaced by unskilled ones, in what could be described as a sort of bureaucratic counter-reform managed by middle-level functionaries of the MoI.⁴²

In what amounts to an admission of at least partial failure of the efforts of his first year in office, in January 2004 Jalali announced a more complex plan to reform the MoI, first by creating structures in the districts, which would enable the administration to be in control of the situation, and second, by training and appointing professional people. The plan was to start with a pilot project in 8 districts in April 2004 and then move on gradually to the rest of the country.⁴³ The impact of this plan will only be felt in the medium to long-term, since the plan itself states the reform should not be completed for at least two to three years.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, 'Disarmament and Reintegration in Afghanistan', *ICG Asia Report*, 65 (30 September 2003), p.5; interview with Jalali in *PakTribune*, 12 April 2004.

⁴¹ See Rubin & Malikyar (2003), p.10.

⁴² Interviews with UN officials in Kunduz, Kabul, Mazar and Herat, October 2003-April 2004.

⁴³ Speech delivered by Minister Jalali, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 31 March 2004.

The MoI plays a key role in the reconstruction, because it appoints the governors and their subordinate staff, the district managers, the chiefs of police and all police officers, as well as the officers of the border guards. In other words, the structure of the state in the provinces largely depends on the MoI. The arrival of international assistance offered new opportunities of corruption to a ministry that was to a large extent re-staffed as soon as the regime of the Taliban fell. *Shura-i Nezar*, the faction in control of the armies that occupied Kabul in late 2001, did not waste time in placing its own men in key posts. This guaranteed that appointments would have been politically motivated, but also favoured the spread of corruption, because it proved impossible to remove corrupt officials who enjoyed the protection of politicians, even when plenty of evidence of their misconduct was available. The most publicized scandals involving the ministers were the ones involving land grabs, in which a number of ministers bought land and then resold it at one hundred times the price, having increased its value thanks to their power to allocate it for particular purposes.⁴⁴ However, from the point of view of the ability of the state to function with minimal effectiveness, the less publicized scandals involving embezzlement or bribery are much more important.

What is worst about the MoI is that misconduct takes place at all levels and on a daily basis. The ministry is not even able to appoint officials according to its own criteria. Police officers, for example, should be recommended by the provincial chief and then approved by the ministry. However, bribing the officials of the MoI in Kabul is such a common practice that many police officers manage to hold on to their jobs or get new jobs even against the advice of their chiefs. It is very common to see police officers replaced on recommendation of their chiefs and then reappointed after a trip to Kabul, where they allegedly bribed the official in charge. There have been cases in which the officers have been replaced and reappointed up to ten times, each time following a trip to Kabul.⁴⁵

Even those ministries that improved their performance, first and foremost the Ministry of Finance, did not achieve this target through deep reforms of their internal structures and patterns, but by creating parallel structures, staffed by a small circle of trusted officials and international advisers, and by relying on foreign sub-contractors. The original structure of the ministry remained in place, sidelined and reduced to produce hardly anything, and no staff were sacked. Of course, the question remains of what will happen the day when the international advisers leave. The non-operational part of the ministry remains a burden for state finances, while overall staffing levels had to be increased, sometimes hiring skilled Afghans from abroad, at higher salaries. Accountability toward international donors was achieved by hiring international auditing companies, whose 'help' is probably not sustainable in the long term, given their high cost. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development, faced a similar situation.⁴⁶ On 10 July 2003, a plan, called Priority Restructuring and Reform, was announced to genuinely reform the ministries,⁴⁷ but at the time of writing it is still unclear whether this will ever be implemented or will remain an unfulfilled promise to international donors. Similarly, the Administrative Reform Commission, again set up under pressure from donors, by the summer of 2004 still had to produce any concrete result, despite the claims of its head, Amin Arsala, "that progress has been made in implementing the plan in some departments".⁴⁸ An anti-corruption department

⁴⁴ John Zarocostas, 'Land grabs threaten peace', *The Washington Times*, 31 March, 2004.

⁴⁵ Interviews with police officers in Faizabad, Teluqan and Kunduz.

⁴⁶ Surkhe *et al.* (2004), p.10.

⁴⁷ See M. Fujimura, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction: the Afghan Economy*, ADB Insititute, Tokyo, 2004, p.94.

⁴⁸ *Arman-e Melli*, 4 July 2004.

was established in March 2004, and it was supposed to be staffed by 400 employees. Two months later no budget had been established for it and only three members of staff had been recruited, which signals at least the low priority of the anti-corruption drive.⁴⁹

Towards a strong, centralized, modern and democratic state?

The difficulties found in reforming the ministries and the administration, and the different degrees of success met, show how external pressure can play a key role. The greater advancement of the reform of the Ministry of Finance, for example, is to be attributed in part to the personality of the minister, Ashraf Ghani; but also to the concern showed by international donors, who considered accountability a precondition for continuing to fund the state budget of Afghanistan. The example of the MoI demonstrates how the will of a single individual, albeit the minister in charge, is not enough to achieve any lasting change. Few doubt that Minister of Interior Jalali is genuinely committed to reform, but it is also evident that he has achieved little. The pressure of donors on the MoI has not been as strong as on the Ministry of Finance, but most importantly the internal resistance to change within the ministry proved much stiffer, because the MoI was taken over by one of the militia factions (*Jamiat-i Islami*) and transformed into its fiefdom. While the central government has some interest in the accountability of the provincial administrations, especially when they are controlled by ‘warlords’ opposed to the ruling factions, it rarely has any interest in its own accountability. Patronage politics remains the norm, even for most of the members of the ‘enlightened’ elite.

However, the lack of a genuine interest in accountability does not mean that a system of checks and balances, or even just the competition among factions and the existence of a recognized opposition, could not force the government to become more accountable. An example is provided by the province of Balkh, where the faction opposed to the governor, a member of *Jamiat*, demanded a neutral governor, while trying to secure loyal governors in the provinces it controls. Eventually a new governor was indeed appointed, in October 2003, although due to his lack of political backing he rapidly fell under the spell of Ustad Atta, the regional commander of *Jamiat-i Islami*.⁵⁰ Interestingly, if the government complains about the corruption of the administrations run by the warlords, often the provincial authorities complain about the central government and ask for a more accountable, transparent and honest administration.

The corruption of the Kabul ministries has not been given much publicity yet, but if one day stories of this type should filter through to the international press, the repercussions on the willingness of national parliaments around the world to authorize further expenditure on Afghanistan could be seriously compromised. It has been pointed out that dependence on foreign aid “encourages accountability towards foreign donors rather than toward the Afghan people”,⁵¹ but the contrary can also be argued, that accountability toward the Afghan people favours accountability toward external donors. It is not the case here to address the issue of the relevance of democracy for development and whether rapid economic progress can better be achieved under an authoritarian regime, but a case can be made that if not democratic institutions and participation from the population, certainly at least a balance of power and the existence of an active opposition are of fundamental importance in developing an accountable state. It can certainly be shown that in Afghanistan pressure from below can play a key role in improving the performance of state structures.

⁴⁹ Gardish (2004).

⁵⁰ Personal interviews, Mazar-i Sharif, June 2004.

⁵¹ Surkhe *et al.* (2004), p.vii.

To talk of ‘civil society’, or in vague terms of the ‘population’, would be misleading; but there are definitely some groups of the population, which in some localities have been organising to form ‘pressure groups’ or complain in some way. Among the social groups that are getting mobilized (at a local level) we find the traditional elites weakened by the war, like the village elders, but also sections of the intelligentsia, traders and businessmen. They want, generally speaking, to reclaim some of the influence that they enjoyed in different periods of the past, but also, more pragmatically, to exercise some control over the activities of local authorities and demand the appointment of more professional and/or honest district managers, chiefs of police, heads of departments or even provincial governors.⁵² An extreme case of the potential impact of mobilization from below is that of the 25th Div. of the Afghan Militia Force, the most disciplined unit of the MoD, which was originally created following a subscription by traders of the Khost area to improve the security of the region against petty warlords. Much more common is the case of petitions and appeals being sent to Kabul, asking for the replacement or reinstatement of some administrator. More generally, the elders and notables often make their opinion heard about the performance of the administrators, and are sometimes successful in getting them replaced, when there is no major force supporting those targeted as being corrupt. In the countryside, even peasants sometimes actively complain, when roads and bridges are not repaired or health care is not available. In a number of cases bad administrators have been chased away by the population, although this is admittedly rare. In some cases, the population has taken up arms to defend some outspoken notable who had demanded the removal of a corrupt chief of police, as happened in Nahrin in April 2004.⁵³ The central government, eager to get the support of voters with the approach of presidential and parliamentary elections, is increasingly inclined to replace local administrators, although most of the time corruption at the ministry and lack of information prevent the new appointees from acting much differently than previous officials. It is likely that with some support from the international community and particularly from donors, who are the ones with the real leverage, such efforts by ‘civil society’ actors could be more successful and have a greater impact.

Conclusions: the real danger might be from within

The danger represented by the regional warlords for the renascent Afghan state might have been exaggerated. The common reaction to the failure in reforming the Afghan state is the demand for a stronger state, which is presumably based on the assumption that the only enemies to be fought are the regional warlords. However, it could be argued that handing over the state, or at least substantial parts of it, to the warlords who control Kabul, and then allowing them to consolidate their hold on the state under the pretext of fighting their colleagues based in the regions, might not just lead to the consolidation of an authoritarian state, but also of a very inefficient, unaccountable and non-modern one. The strengthening of the state is a process qualitatively different from the mere strengthening of the individual actors or parties/factions that control it. More than a larger number of foreign troops, on which the debate focused during the first half of 2004, what was needed was political leadership in Kabul, which the international community would then need to support. Abundant leverage is available in the form of funding of the state budget and help for reconstruction.

⁵² Personal interviews with local notables, northeastern Afghanistan, October 2003-May 2004.

⁵³ Interview with UN official, Kunduz, April 2004.

Progress towards an accountable, transparent and efficient Afghan state has so far been modest and could be further slowed down by the continuing tendency to trade political support for official positions. In his ongoing attempt to strike a deal with some factions of the Taliban and of *Hizb-i Islami*, President Karzai might well have to offer some power sharing in exchange for the cessation of hostilities. This could translate into a couple of ministerial positions and several provincial and district governorships being allocated to sympathizers of the Taliban, with predictable effects on the administration of the areas affected. While this would further slow the modernization of the Afghan state, time might be running out. Signs of donor fatigue were emerging by mid-2004, not least because Iraq was increasingly attracting international attention.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See on this point Barnett R. Rubin, Abby Stoddard, Humayun Hamidzada & Adib Farhadi, *Building a New Afghanistan: the Value of Success, the Cost of Failure*, Center on International Cooperation, New York University, March 2004.

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

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Research Objectives

- 1 We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- 2 We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- 3 We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- 4 We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



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